

COVID-19: WHAT IS HAPPENING IN EUROPEAN PRISONS?

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EUROPEAN
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WHAT DOES THE "NEW NORMALITY" LOOK LIKE IN PRISON?

During the Covid-19 emergency, the European Prison Observatory has released [weekly updates](#) on the situation of prisons around Europe. Most European prison systems took several actions to face the virus, such as the introduction of restrictions to the entrance of family members, staff, and volunteers, decarceration measures to facilitate social distancing hence lowering the chances to spread the virus in prisons, or more phone and video calls to favour contacts with family members who were not allowed anymore to visit their detained relatives.

After the first emergency phase, restrictions started to be lifted. However, the situation is not back to a complete normality because the risk of contracting the virus is still very real; therefore, the partners of the European Prison Observatory have decided to publish new issues of the series [Covid-19: what is happening in European prisons?](#) to try to depict the "new normality" in prison systems around Europe.

The following information on **Austrian** prisons has been collected in the last few weeks thanks to the work of EPO's member **LUDWIG BOLTZMANN INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RIGHTS** and is updated to 23 September 2020. The information published here and the upcoming updates will be available on the [European Prison Observatory website](#).

Other information can be found on the following websites.

The **Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)** has launched an [information hub](#) of news and resources, including on how different actors in the criminal justice, penitentiary, healthcare and oversight spaces are responding to the COVID-19 situation around the world.

The **European Organization of Prison and Correctional Services (EUOPRIS)** has set up a [webpage](#) where it gathers and shares all regulations/protocols/approaches European Prison Services or related organisations have drafted or taken in order to deal with the Covid-19 virus.

Prison Insider collected in a [webpage](#) the measures that countries around the world are taking to guarantee the safety of all prisoners and prison staff and the consequences of the pandemic on the living conditions in prisons.

World Prison Brief is compiling a [list](#) of news articles from around the world on COVID-19 and prisons which will be updated regularly.

Fair Trials has launched the [COVID-19 Justice project](#) to monitor how criminal justice systems are being affected by the pandemic and their response.

WHICH COVID-19 RULES STILL CURRENTLY APPLY TO PRISONS?

In principle, all rules set out in the first months of the pandemic in Austrian prisons are still in place. Increased hygiene measures still apply (disinfectants should be available throughout prison buildings and prisons should be equipped with mouth/nose protections which partially come from in-house production). Everybody entering the prison needs to take their temperature measured before entering the prison buildings and are required to wear a mouth/nose protection at all times. Court hearings are predominantly held online. New prisoners are isolated for their first 10 days in a separate department and should get tested before being transferred within the prison. Staff members need to wear mouth/nose protection whenever interacting with other staff members or prisoners. Prisoners should get the opportunity to call and video-call their relatives more frequently. Inmates are only allowed to exit the prison for acute and necessary personal undertakings. Those, who are granted to leave the prison more regularly should be separated from prisoners who do not leave the prison. Work, training courses and therapy have restarted with June 2020. (All regulations can be seen [here](#), in German only).

HAVE IN PERSON FAMILY VISITS RESUMED?

Yes, since the 11th of May 2020 family visits have resumed. The visitors, two at maximum, and the prisoner are spatially separated by a Plexiglas wall to minimize the risk of infection. Before entering the prison building visitors need to get their temperature measured and are required to wear a mouth/nose protection.



HAVE ACTIVITIES PREVIOUSLY CARRIED OUT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCING RESUMED IN PERSON?

Court proceedings can be carried out again in person, but also via videoconferencing. The decision hereby is taken by the judge. Conferences between prison staff and management can be done via videoconferencing and the decision rests with the respective prison management.

ARE OTHER PERSONNEL (NOT BELONGING TO PRISON STAFF) ALLOWED TO ENTER IN PRISONS?

Concerning visit conditions for other personnel, no clear information could be found. But as educational courses and church services, both carried out by

external personnel, continued to take place since June 2020, it is assumed that other personnel is allowed to enter prisons. Furthermore, the webpage of the Ministry of Justice states that therapies take place in person, but also via phone or video call.

IS TECHNOLOGY (E.G. PHONE CALLS, VIDEO CALLS, EMAILS) STILL USED TO MAINTAIN CONTACTS WITH THE FAMILY AND/OR FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES? WHICH ONES?

Yes, prisoners are still allowed to use phones and similar technological devices and should be granted the possibility to use these devices for increased time periods. To counterbalance the negative effects of the COVID-19 security measures, prisoners should be able to receive material for in-cell activities such as board games, cards, painting supplies or (if the respective prison infrastructure allows for it) to spend more time in the open air or doing sports.



CURRENTLY ARE THERE INMATES POSITIVE TO COVID-19?

According to the information provided by Austria's Ministry of Justice no inmates have currently tested positive to COVID-19.

HOW MANY INMATES HAVE BEEN POSITIVE TO COVID-19 SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE PANDEMIC?

According to Austrian newspapers only 3 prisoners (newcomers) and 8 staff members have tested positive since the start of the pandemic.

WHAT DOES THE "NEW NORMAL" LOOK LIKE IN PRISON?

The "new normal" can only be described by listing the current security measures (see question 1). The long-term consequences of COVID-19 on Austria's prisons are yet to be analysed, but it is clear that the restrictions on visits (no physical contact) and days outside of prison are an additional burden for prisoners and their families, especially for children, but also for rehabilitation and reintegration efforts before release. Furthermore, media reported that there were cases which required preventive quarantine for up to 130 prisoners due to suspected Covid-19 cases.



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